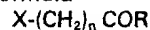


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(54) Method of preparing enzyme conjugates, their use and coupling agents for use in the method

(57) Enzyme conjugates useful in immunoassay methods are prepared by reacting a coupling reagent having the formula



wherein X is halogen; n is from 1 to 8 and R is a radical which reacts with the amino group of the macromolecule, firstly with an amino-containing macromolecule, and thereafter with a enzyme comprising a sulphhydryl group. The enzyme conjugates can be prepared by this method in a high yield and of high specificity.

SPECIFICATION

Method of preparing enzyme conjugates, their use and coupling agents for use in the method

Enzyme-macromolecule conjugates are typically used for the detection and determination of substances present in very low quantities; for example, nanogram quantities of substances in biological fluids, such as urine and serum. A wide variety of enzymes may be used to form the conjugate, but the enzymes selected are often those enzymes which can be detected with great sensitivity. The macromolecular portion of the conjugate can be derived from a wide variety of amino-containing compounds, including, but not limited to, nucleic acids, proteins, hormones, antigens and allergens, which are characterised by containing amino groups.

Enzyme conjugates are prepared in a conjugation reaction with a polyfunctional coupling reagent which links the enzyme and macromolecule together by reaction with one or more of the reactive groups in the reactants. In the preparation of enzyme conjugates, it is most desirable to produce enzyme conjugates of high stability, high specificity and good reproducibility.

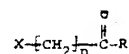
In some coupling reactions to prepare enzyme conjugates, it has been suggested to employ a conditioner compound, such as a polyamine, to improve specificity of the enzyme conjugate, with resulting improvement in the detection method due to low signal-to-noise ratio during detection in the immunochemical test. The preparation of enzyme conjugates, employing coupling reagents with conditioners, is described in United States Patent No. 4,002,532.

A new coupling agent has been described for preparation of an enzyme-coupled insulin conjugate for use in the immuno-assay of insulin. The coupling agent is meta-maleimidobenzoyl N-hydroxysuccinimide ester (MBS), a bifunctional reagent which acylates the amino groups of the insulin by reaction with the N-hydroxysuccinimide ester group and by forming thioester bonds with the enzyme by addition of the thiol groups to the maleimide group. This coupling agent has been employed in preparing an enzymatically active and immuno-reactive B-D-galactosidase - MBS - insulin conjugate (see *J. Biochem.*, 79, 233-236 (1976), "Enzyme Coupled Immunoassay of Insulin Using a Novel Coupling Reagent", Kitagawa, T and Aikawa, T.). Although the MBS coupling reagent is satisfactory in some respects, it is desirable to obtain enzyme conjugates of greater stability and greater specificity and sensitivity.

This invention relates to novel coupling reagents, which reagents are useful in the preparation of stable enzyme conjugates, to the method of preparing enzyme conjugates employing the coupling reagents, and to the use of the enzyme conjugates in immunoassay methods.

According to the invention there is provided a method of preparing an enzyme conjugate, which method comprises reacting an amino-containing

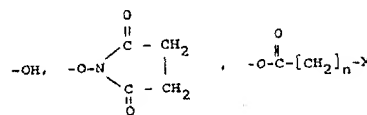
macromolecule with a coupling reagent of the formula:



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wherein X is halogen; n is a whole number or from 1 to 8; and R represents any radical capable of reacting with an amino group of the macromolecule to form a reagent-macromolecule compound, and reacting the sulph-hydryl-reacting halogen X of the reagent-macromolecule compound with a sulph-hydryl group of an enzyme to form an enzyme-conjugate compound comprising enzyme and macromolecule conjugately linked by the coupling reagent.

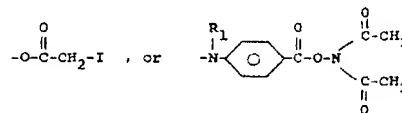
X preferably is iodine; n preferably is 1 to 4; and R preferably is



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where n and X are as previously defined, particularly an iodoacetyl group

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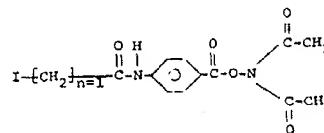
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wherein R₁ is hydrogen or alkyl, such as methyl.

Other amino-reacting groups may be employed as the R radical.

The most preferred coupling reagent is N-succinimidyl (4-iodoacetyl) aminobenzoate (SIAB) having the structural formula:

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The SIAB reagent produces enzymes conjugates with unexpectedly high yield and specific immunochemo, enzyme and conjugate activity. Enzyme conjugates prepared with SIAB, in comparison to other prior art coupling reagents, such as MBS, provide enzyme conjugates of high stability and high specific conjugate yields.

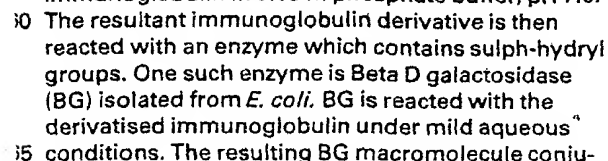
Specific useful coupling reagents include, but are not limited to: iodoacetic acid; iodoacetic anhydride; and N-hydroxysuccinimide ester of iodoacetic acid.

Iodoacetic acid reacts with -NH₂ groups in the presence of a water-soluble carbodiimide, such as 1-ethyl-3-(3-dimethylaminopropyl) carbodiimide. Iodoacetic anhydride reacts directly with -NH₂ groups. In other cases, the coupling reagents can be prepared by reacting the selected halo organic acid or acid anhydride in a solvent with the R amino-reacting portion of the molecule, and recovering the reagent. For example, SIAB can be synthesised by reaction of iodoacetic anhydride with *para*-aminobenzoic acid in an organic solvent, such as dioxane. The resultant intermediate compound is

5 The resultant product, which may be crystallised, is SIAB.

For example, the method of the invention provides for the preparation of an enzyme conjugate with a high degree of specific coupling, as represented by the following illustrative reaction with SIAB:

45 Generically the method of preparation can be represented as follows:—



115 The enzyme conjugates may be employed in the prior art techniques for the detection of antibodies; for example, as set forth in U.S. Patent No. 4,002,532 wherein the detection method comprises adhering, such as by absorption, to a solid support or absorbent material, such as a disc, which binds or absorbs the antibodies or other macromolecules to be detected; adding to the solid support material a fluid, such as serum or urine, to bind the antibodies therein to the support material used; for example, 120 incubating the serum with the disc; washing the support material to remove unbound components of the fluid, such as nonspecifically bound and absorbed serum proteins, from the disc surface; adding the enzyme conjugate to the washed support, such as by incubation of the disc with an

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EXAMPLE 4*Comparison of RaShlg-BG Conjugates*

A conjugate prepared as in Example 2 was prepared in a buffered enzyme solution of standard units (10,000) of enzyme activity per ml and tested, as in United States Patent No. 4,002,532 (column 5, line 55, column 6, line 1), to determine that the conjugate exhibited a high degree of specificity as illustrated by the S/N ratio shown in the table below, when compared with conjugates prepared in a similar manner, but with prior-art coupling agents MBS and W-R agent (see United States Patent No. 4,002,532, Example 1).

TABLE I

Comparison of S/N of Sheep Immunoglobulin (Shlg) Conjugates of Beta Galactosidase (BG)

Units of Shlg-BG Added Per Disc		Coupling Reagent		
		SIAB*	MBS*	W-R
1		94±7	41±1	67±4
10		63±2	58±1	52±2
100		32±2	18±0	20±1

* Numbers are S/N ± standard deviation of duplicate measurements. S is binding to immuno specific RaShlg discs. N is binding to normal nonspecific Rabbit Rlg discs.

The maximum S/N ratio for SIAB is almost twice the S/N for the MBS coupling agent, and the S/N for SIAB was rising monotonically while the MBS S/N went through a maximum value. Thus, SIAB conjugates could be used at even lower than unit concentrations to provide even better S/N ratios. The S/N ratios establish that the SIAB conjugates are highly specific in comparison to prior-art conjugates. This is borne out by a comparison of SIAB and W-R conjugates in a test for HB_sAg (Table II).

TABLE II

Comparison of Conjugates* of Beta Galactosidase (BG) in a Test for Hepatitis B-Surface Angiten (HB_sAg)

HB _s Ag (ng)	SIAB**	W-R**	SIAB/W-R
0	0	0	—
0	0	0	—
3.13	0.00462	0.00115	4.02
3.13	0.00322	0.00196	1.64
6.25	0.00815	0.00226	3.61
6.25	0.00645	0.00156	4.13
12.50	0.01435	0.00786	1.83
12.50	0.01275	0.00766	1.66
25.00	0.02035	0.01376	1.55
25.00	0.02145	0.01396	1.54

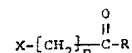
* Conjugates are Rabbit anti-goat Ig coupled to beta galactosidase used to detect goat anti-HB_sAg.

** Numbers are units of BG bound to each immunosorbent disc.

The average SIAB/W-R is 2.5; that is, an average of 2.5 times more SIAB conjugate was specifically bound. The procedure followed was that set forth in United States Patent No. 4,002,532.

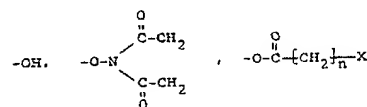
CLAIMS

1. A method of preparing an enzyme conjugate, which method comprises reacting an amino-containing macromolecule with a coupling reagent of the formula:

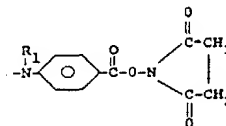


wherein X is halogen; n is a whole number of from 1 to 8; and R represents any radical capable of reacting with an amino group of the macromolecule to form a reagent-macromolecule compound, and reacting the sulph-hydryl-reacting halogen X of the reagent-macromolecule compound with sulph-hydryl group of an enzyme to form an enzyme-conjugate compound comprising enzyme and macromolecule conjugately linked by the coupling reagent.

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein R represents



wherein n and X are as defined in claim 1 or



wherein R₁ is hydrogen or an alkyl group.

3. A method according to claim 1 or 2 wherein X is iodine.

4. A method according to claim 1 or 2 wherein n is from 1 to 4.

5. A method according to claim 1 wherein a haloacetyl N-succinimidyl compound is used as coupling reagent.

6. A method according to claim 1 wherein N-succinimidyl (4-iodoacetyl) aminobenzoate is used as coupling reagent.

7. A method according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the amino-containing macromolecule comprises a non-enzyme proteinaceous macromolecule selected from antibodies, antigens, allergens, hormones, immunoglobulin and serum substances.

8. A method according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the enzyme comprises beta-D-galactosidase.

9. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein the enzyme comprises a B-D-galactosidase and the macromolecule comprises immunoglobulin.

10. A method according to claim 1 substantially as described in Example 2.

11. A process for the detection of antibodies, which process comprises:

a) removing the unbound components of the fluid from the solid support material;

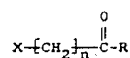
b) adding an enzyme conjugate prepared in accordance with a method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10 to the solid support material, whereby the conjugate is bound in proportion to the quantity of bound antibodies to the support material;

c) removing unbound conjugate from the support material; and

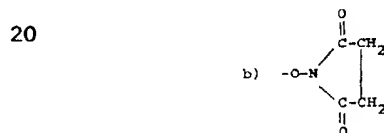
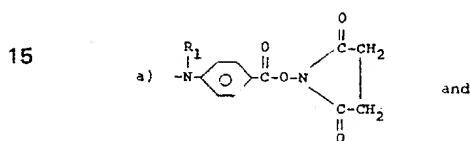
d) determining the presence of bound antibodies by the enzymatic activity of the conjugate.

12. A process according to claim 11 substantially as described with reference to Example 4.

13. A compound suitable for use as a coupling reagent to form enzyme conjugates, which compound is of the formula:



10 wherein X is halogen; n is a whole number of from 1 to 8; and R is an amino-reactive radical selected from:



25 wherein R₁ is hydrogen or lower alkyl.

14. A compound according to claim 13, which compound is N-succinimidyl (4-iodoacetyl) aminobenzoate.

15. A compound according to claim 13, which compound is iodacetyl - N - succinimide.